

MINUTES
RAMSEY COUNTY CHARTER COMMISSION
February 2, 2009
7:00 p.m.

Association of Minnesota Counties Building
125 Charles Avenue, St. Paul, MN

MEMBERS PRESENT:

District 1: Ben Stephens
District 4: Christopher Leifeld
Peter Hendricks
District 5: Rod Halvorson (Chair)
Lyle Nelson
District 7: Bud Berry
At-Large: Beth M. Miller
Minoka Kitto

MEMBERS ABSENT:

District 1: Sharon Klumpp (unexcused)
District 2: Elwyn Sands (unexcused)
District 3: Frank Gurney (unexcused)
District 6: A. L. Brown (unexcused)
Russ Miller (excused)
District 7: Marvin C. Koppen (excused)
At-Large: Mike Fratto (excused)

OTHERS PRESENT: Darwin Lookingbill, County Attorney's Office; Bonnie Jackelen, County Manager's Office; and Jim Schottmuller, citizen.

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Halvorson called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. A quorum was not present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

As a quorum was not present, Mr. Nelson moved, seconded by Mr. Stephens Berry, to tentatively approve the minutes of the October 27, 2008 Charter Commission meeting, which will be voted upon at the next meeting. MOTION CARRIED.

CITIZEN INPUT:

There was no citizen input.

NEW BUSINESS

COUNTY BOARD UPDATE:

There was no County Commissioner present.

DISCUSSION RE: MEMBERS WITH THREE CONSECUTIVE, UNEXCUSED ABSENCES/DEFINITIONS:

Ms. Jackelen provided a listing of Charter Commission members and the meetings each member had missed in 2008. There was concern expressed that some people had missed several meetings without notifying the Chair or Ms. Jackelen.

It was noted that some individuals had missed three consecutive meetings, in particular Ms. Klumpp. Ms. Kitto thought that letters were sent to people when they missed too many meetings. This is not the case. The Commission needs to decide what to do in the case of unexcused absences.

Mr. Nelson requested clarification of the definition of "excused" and "unexcused" absences.

Mr. Lookingbill suggested that the definition could be:

- a. Excused: A person has called or emailed the Chair or Ms. Jackelen with notification of their absence.
- b. Unexcused: There is no communication prior to or shortly after the scheduled meeting.

Mr. Stephens pointed out that it is difficult to have a hard and fast rule regarding absences because of other conflicts. Mr. Berry agreed. Mr. Nelson stated that a member could make a phone call if there is a conflict.

The Commission By-laws state that a majority of the Commission members may remove a member from the Commission if the member has three (3) or more consecutive unexcused absences from regularly scheduled Commission meetings.

Mr. Halvorson clarified that there are three possibilities to address Ms. Klumpp's unexcused absences:

- a. Motion to remove her from the Charter Commission
- b. Send letter to Ms. Klumpp and ask her intent to serve or resign
- c. Do nothing

There was a discussion to determine what action to take regarding Ms. Klumpp. Mr. Berry moved, seconded by Mr. Nelson, that Ms. Jackelen draft a letter to Ms. Klumpp, for Mr. Halvorson's signature, notifying her of her absences and asking her to either consider resigning from the Commission or her intent to continue to serve on the commission. MOTION CARRIED

(NOTE: On Tuesday, February 3, 2009, Ms. Klumpp submitted a letter of resignation to the District Court stating that she had had too many business conflicts to fulfill her obligations to the Commission. Therefore, a letter from the Chair was not sent to her.)

Mr. Halvorson requested Ms. Jackelen to keep a record of individual absences. This would be a cumulative count, in particular tracking three consecutive unexcused absences. It was also requested that excused absences be noted in the minutes. This procedure would begin with this meeting and go into the future. It was noted that members who contact Ms. Jackelen regarding an absence would be listed as an excused absence.

Mr. Leifeld asked if members receive a reminder phone call for each meeting. Ms. Jackelen responded that that practice was discontinued some time ago due to lack of available staff time.

POTENTIAL ISSUES TO DISCUSS IN 2009

Mr. Halvorson began the discussion that was initiated at the last meeting regarding issues that the Commission could review in 2009. Members were asked to email Mr. Halvorson and/or Ms. Jackelen with suggestions. Three members responded with suggestions. Mr. Halvorson asked if there were any more suggestions.

The suggestions received were:

1. Commissioners' salary
2. Online checkbook reporting
3. Term limits for Commissioners

4. Contribution limits to PAC committees
5. Follow-up to lawsuit Roseville vs. Advent Lutheran Church

It was suggested that the Commission could review the Charter section by section. There was some disagreement with this approach as each member can and should review the Charter for potential revisions. There was a consensus that the Commission would proceed with specific suggestions regarding revisions to the Charter.

The next step would be to rank the suggestions and to take on the issues in order to bring in the appropriate people (staff/experts) to inform members about the issues.

Mr. Berry asked when the Charter had last been fully reviewed. Mr. Lookingbill responded that it was approximately five (5) years ago.

Mr. Nelson stated that the Commission needs to have specific ideas to discuss. Mr. Halvorson agreed, stating that experts could be brought in to discuss specific subject matters so that Commission members can gather information on the topics in order to proceed with a recommendation.

The issue of the Sheriff's appointment vs. election was mentioned again; additional follow up could be done on the issue. Another suggestion was to look at how the Commissioner's salaries are determined and if there is a way to have salary increases occur after the elections.

Mr. Halvorson stated that the Commission needs to have specific ideas and that the only specific ideas were those that were emailed prior to the meeting. Mr. Halvorson asked for more specific ideas from the group. There being none he recommended that the ideas presented should be ranked so that they can be researched and discussed.

The final list of suggestions is: (rank in order)

1. County Commissioner's term limits
2. County Commissioner's salaries
3. County checkbook online
4. Sheriff and County Attorney issue (appointment vs. election)
5. Campaign finance/PAC contribution limits.

There was further discussion on each of the issues to define the next steps for them. Items such as transparency, technology and procedure changes were discussed.

Mr. Berry pointed out that there are some language changes that should be reviewed throughout the Charter. For example in section 4.03 Personnel Officer is outdated and needs to be updated.

Items for future discussion will include potential revision to the Initiative and Referendum chapter of the Charter, in particular as it relates to the Commissioner's salary issue.

The Agenda of the next meeting will include term limits; review of Commissioner salary process and discussion of an online checkbook.

Mr. Nelson agreed that there was newer terminology that should be changed in the document. He suggested that this review could come from the staff and therefore would not need to be reviewed by the Commission for such things.

Mr. Halvorson pointed out that the Commission would not want to bring these types of changes to the Commissioners unless there were other substantive recommendations to make.

OLD BUSINESS:

Mr. Halvorson opened the discussion regarding a review of the Commission By-laws. It was determined that a small group from the Commission should review and submit suggestions for the whole Commission to vote on. Mr. Nelson and Mr. Stephens will take on this task and report back to the commission at the next meeting.

NEXT MEETING:

Monday, May 4, 2009 - 7:00 p.m.
Vadnais Heights City Hall
800 East County Road E
Vadnais Heights

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40pm.

kfz